

"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

# The Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin

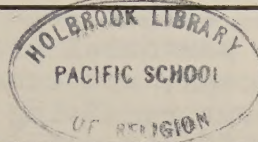
---

Published by The Christian Rural Fellowship, 475 Riverside Drive, New York 27, N. Y.

---

No. 221

Summer, 1960



## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TOWN AND COUNTRY CHURCHES

E. J. Niederfrank\*

The basis of your short course this year-- problems and techniques for churches in declining or expanding areas-- represents a realistic approach to town-country church situations today. These are two main types of change that have occurred throughout various parts of rural America in the last quarter century.

### Change - staff and public understanding - strategy

I also have been impressed by the similarity of your church problems with those we have in extension work. We, too, are concerned about what to do in regard to nonfarm rural people, and in regard to adjusting programs to new interests and procedures, changing farm and home technology.

Looking at the rural church situation, I think what we continually need is a meaningful strategy. That is what we need in extension. Such strategy has to possess these elements: (1) flexibility, (2) facts soundly interpreted, and (3) an adequate guiding philosophy.

Take the one-room schools for example: many of them here in the Midwest were put two miles apart for some good reasons, and other important values grew up with them. But what is the guiding philosophy of school consolidation today, or of church consolidation? Is it bigness, or numbers, or activities, or costs in dollars? These are hardly enough for a guiding philosophy. Somehow we have to tie back to human values and family-community objectives. Several speakers have implied guiding philosophy in their points about evangelism and a church for everyone and the message relevant to life.

---

\*Dr. Niederfrank is Extension Rural Sociologist for the United States Department of Agriculture. Adapted from an address first given before the Thirtieth Annual Rural Pastors' and Lay Leaders' Short Course, University of Illinois, February 1960. Used with kind permission.



Let us first look at our subject.

Take the term: Community

What do you think of when you read this word? Community means town plus the surrounding area it serves. Some of us think that the community ends at the end of main street. It is easy to become town-centered. It often happens without our realizing it. This is true not just of ministers; it is a perennial problem of public health workers, welfare agencies, civic groups, and commercial leaders. Dr. Lindstrom told me a few years ago about receiving a letter from a clergyman who told him to take his name off his mailing list as he was no longer a rural pastor. Dave looked up the town where this man was located and it had a population of 600. Here was the connotation that a pastor's community of concern is only the town center. But wherever you are located, I hope that you are concerned with the total population of the community you are serving--town, and suburban. All are a part of the community.

Today, the problem is made more difficult because communities are not clear cut in boundary line. And we have to deal with different kinds- townships, school districts, town lines, zoning areas, as well as the sociological community. Furthermore, the traditional rural-urban dichotomy doesn't fit very well. Nowhere does either exist in pure form. The big word today is just community. We try to understand it and deal with it for what it is in given places. Let us think community-wide, not just town-wide or congregation-wide.

Some rural areas now fall within the sphere of larger towns some distance away. But do the institutions of these towns yet feel the responsibility they should toward the neighborhoods now within their widening sphere of influence?

Next is the term: Development

What does this mean to you? I hope it means both economic and non-economic matters. First are things; it means good homes with good streets and roads, parks, churches, schools, health services.

But secondly, it also means adequate income, the economic base to achieve all these things. This includes good farms; alert main street businesses; industries or other sources of income to meet the economic needs of the people. Local clergymen are trying to be alert to local economic changes. Probably a lot in your area has happened in the last ten years that you may not know or realize. These changes may explain certain church problems or successes.

But to me development means more than dollars and things; it means values and attitudes. It means experience in doing things together--the self-solution of problems. It means nobleness of character and pride in good workmanship. It means acceptance of change.



## Next is Cooperation.

Both professional and lay leaders stumble over this concept more than any other. We all know that cooperation means working together in reaching some objective. Cooperation entails some "costs," such as time, perhaps a little loss of identity or failure to get all the credit. Cooperation is going to be needed more in the future than today. We are becoming involved in matters of country-wide and world-wide cooperation, and about great questions of human relations and economic welfare; philosophies of life;-questions that call for the highest level of thought, with peoples far away.

Yet high-level cooperation rests upon development of it right at home. Are we training leadership for cooperation, by trying to practice it in our local affairs?

Think of the tremendous technological advancements and expansion predicted for the immediate years ahead. The recently published annual report of the Resources for the Future, Inc. (Ford Foundation) predicts 225 million population in fifteen years and 330 million by the year 2000, just forty years away. During the next twenty-five years we will also see larger towns and bulging suburbs all over the countryside. In fact, between 1950 and 1959, while the farm population in standard metropolitan areas was declining seven percent, the rural nonfarm population increased 117 percent and the central cities only 1.5. Beyond the metropolitan areas the rural nonfarm population even increased forty-two percent while the farm population here declined fourteen percent. Think of the diversity of occupations and interests that there will be in the great majority of communities tomorrow, and the multiplicity of contacts and groups and concerns.

## Self-image of our own role in the community.

What is your concept as to the role of the church today? What is its role in regard to community development? What is the role of the local clergyman in regard to these things? Here you see, we can become involved in a deep subject.

There are several general philosophies on this matter.

1. You may believe that the churches and the clergymen should be all things to all people; that you are the dominant leader in the community with the responsibility to help with many kinds of decisions.



E. J. Niederfrank



2. At the other extreme is the completely hands-off church and clergyman with nothing whatever to do about community matters.
3. Some would say that religion has a big leadership role but that the churches and clergymen make their impact by influencing the actions of Man as he witnesses in the community. Thus, this idea holds that there does not have to be any direct involvement of church or clergy in the activities.
4. Still others would limit the role of the local church to a particular concern which seems to more directly relate to religious ideals, social welfare, racial tension, relief of suffering.
5. Some would limit the role of clergymen to only participation as a citizen of the community. And some would believe that even care should be taken in performing this role lest the church or the clergyman gets into trouble.

The local church is one of the most important social systems operating in the community. For that is what the community is-- a network of social systems centered about a given locality.

#### Role Studies

Samuel W. Blizzard's study of Protestant minister roles shows that community service is among the top five or six roles of town and country ministers. Around twenty-five percent of them rate it fairly high. However, he found that they dealt with different kinds of community problems and in different ways, representing good adjustment to the communities in which they were serving. The metropolitan-urban ministers stressed racial, ethnic and civil-rights issues; also interpretation and personal guidance relating to family welfare agencies. Their main approach was to relate to special-problem groups, such as serving on human relations councils, delinquency prevention groups, and in professional clergy groups. Their addresses and counseling also reflected these kinds of problems.

The small city and town-country ministers, on the other hand, emphasized taking stands on puritan ideals of conduct, on religious controversies, on school issues, and on community improvement problems. They were more likely to get into discussions about progressive vs. fundamental education, school consolidation, getting a hospital, the new taverns, the value of work and workmanship, and perhaps certain controversies in religion. Their main approaches were by participating in the community service clubs, farm organizations, and civic groups.

Anyway, I believe you can see the point that roles and how we perform them do have some relevance to our subject of community development. With communities differing so much in structure and problems, and the tremendous changes taking place, you can also see how a major tool or skill which every clergyman must have is understanding.



## Part of the community

Surely, the local clergyman does not just reside in the community, concerned only with his little company of church people. Rather, he is of the community. I am sure that this is not a new idea. Many of you are following it. Your discussions in other sessions of this conference prove that. Clergymen speak, write, and work. Clergymen help influence public opinion, help formulate policies, help conduct projects.

My, how we need to give more attention to such subjects in community development. Some recent studies made by the Department of Agriculture point up that a main factor in rural industrial growth and adjustment of people to resources is not merely getting new industries here and there or helping a few families farm better, but that it is a matter of more attention to investment of money for basic human development--better education, better health, better recreation, better leadership.

Public administrators are beginning to see that it is the lack of these things that retards economic growth and the adjustment of people to better ways of living. We must have more investment for basic human development in the low income areas if we are to expect the people in such areas to adjust to higher modes of living.

Some say that the church does not have the position of local leadership that it once had. Perhaps it is now finding a stronger role again as socio-economic change makes a greater impact on the local community. New opportunities for your cooperation and leadership are arising. There are new resources to relate to and about new problems.

Basically your roles in community development may be summed up as the following:

Counselor  
Liaison  
Stimulator

Leader of study and planning  
Leader of logical thinking  
Facilitator  
Organizer

Msgr. L. G. Lugutti, Executive Director of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, in a speech last year before a conference on Rural Development at Memphis, Tennessee, said:

"Some people hold that business is business; that the church belongs within its own walls and that to save souls is its only business, not serving economic and social affairs. But on the contrary, I say that man is body and soul, created to God's image and likeness, and you cannot separate out the religious part from his economic and social parts--he is an integral being. By the same token, the church cannot live apart from the community in which it is located...The church has a role. It has an obligation to use it."



All this again brings us to the next point, which I will only touch on briefly in order to have it in our total picture. That is:

### More community cooperation a necessity

Do we not today have to accept the necessity of cooperation as a fact, if maximum results are to be effected? The increasing complexity of society will demand more and more cooperation if there is to be survival, locally or world-wide. Today, interdependence is a key principle. It has been a long time since farms were self-sufficient. Communities can no longer live alone isolated from others. Neither can churches, or co-ops, or other organizations.

The more complex and interwoven our local communities become-- and they are getting this way fast-- the greater is the need for cooperative efforts. Every institution and organization is affected by every other one, and by what happens in the larger society beyond. Churches are a part of the town and the town is a part of the community. What hurts or benefits one, hurts or benefits all.

Some say the rule will be cooperation or "die." It may not need to be put quite this strongly. But even today many communities do suffer from too many independent actions by this or that group. And in organizations and churches we have hand-me-down programs galore, while community-wide problems seem to belong to nobody, so they fall through the slats unsolved or only partially treated.

Today we have more community resources and concerned agencies with which to cooperate. And no problem today falls within one sphere of solution; there is growing need for interdisciplinary approaches. Change is producing new opportunities for cooperation and service.

Many problems needing group decision will arise, ranging all the way from community services and land use to city-country relations, youth concerns, and matters of economic growth. Take youth opportunities, for example, about 26 million young people will be entering the labor force in the United States during the 60's, compared to 19 million during the 50's. Some experts estimate that roughly only about 1 in 8 or 10 of the youth now on farms can expect to become established in full-time commercial farming. All the remainder will have to shift to nonfarm employment; however, much of it may be related to agriculture. What kind of upbringing and training will these rural youth need in order to best adjust to assure successful adjustment to work and living elsewhere and under community conditions new even to us.

### What are the main forms of community cooperation?

We can identify about six basic types of community cooperation. Churches and clergymen can use all of them. The types are:



## 1. Selective joint action on special problems.

This is a common type of community cooperation, often-times not recognized as such. It goes on with all degrees of formality but usually gets results. It is merely you and someone else deciding to do something together. For example, in Sleepy Hollow, the Methodist Church agrees to jointly sponsor with the school system a new summer recreation program. Three persons from each institution will serve on a committee to organize and run the project, with a member of the school board as chairman. Almost every community has examples of this kind of cooperation.

If you are contributing to community development in some such way, take encouragement. For this is a fundamental kind of community cooperation. It is based on local leadership and local organization. It does not depend on some outside agency. Although such assistance may be sought and used from time to time.

## 2. Individual counseling and services to particular programs.

Probably every one of you engage in this form of cooperation many times during the year. For example, you counsel with the school principal on a proposed idea, or you discuss a local problem when speaking to a service club luncheon or to the school student body. In this way you plant a seed. Sometimes this is all you need to do. Or perhaps a church service is devoted to the 4-H Club on Rural Life Sunday or to Soil Stewardship week, and together you and the club put on a service centering around the theme: "Conservation of Land and Conservation of People." Sometimes a local clergyman may counsel or assist a county farm or home adviser in relation to some project. You may counsel a co-op, or some public welfare. Maybe the church ground is being used as a landscaping project. Perhaps you are on a subcommittee of some organization working on a phase of community development. This counseling type of cooperation for community development is based on sharing and participation as a local citizen. You may be called on because you have a particular skill needed. It also rests on cooperative attitude. It can be the beginning to greater leadership for you later. After all, in many town-country communities the local clergyman is one of only two or three professional trained leaders available. You have a responsibility--an obligation--to lend leadership, not just an opportunity.

## 3. The community participant type.

Here the clergyman is a member of the PTA because he has children in the school. He may also be a member of the Rotary Club, or American Legion, if they are not afraid he will cramp their style too much. Anyway, as a citizen and as a trained leader you lend concern and give assistance to programs for community development. Each one of you is likely cooperating in this way, but perhaps you would like to do more of it or with better quality. Often a clergyman is called in when it is too late. Somehow, if they were more concerned as community leaders, or if other organizations would recognize their leadership, they might become involved sooner in programs which need their participation.



#### 4. Special-interest committees or councils

For example, the Sleepy Hollow Recreation Council is made up of representatives from all groups in the community having a concern for improved recreation. Or it may be that you are on a community health council, or youth welfare council. This type of community organization is more common in expanding communities.

#### 5. Overall community council.

This type of organization has been advocated for years. But its use is still less frequent than less formalized types of community effort. It also requires positive leadership and significant problems with which to work. More community councils have failed because of a lack in these two factors, than because of any other cause.

#### 6. Finally, there is the community improvement association.

This is similar to 5 except that instead of being a delegate body, the people of the community belong to the organization and it functions as a community club or association. Monthly meetings of educational and social nature are held, the usual officers are at the head, and yearly programs of work are outlined by project committees.

Churches are usually a focal center of such programs. These programs have produced much improvement in churches and church programs throughout the South in the last ten years. Clergymen are in many cases local leaders in the movement.

#### But there are some basic requirements

These are:

1. Have an understanding and concern for all of the community.
2. Have a concern for the problem at hand.
3. Know resources and aim to relate to them as situations indicate.
4. Follow the logical, scientific steps in planning and action.
5. Be willing to give of self, including giving up at times a certain amount of identity and being willing to share the credit.

# # #



contemplate the good that can be in our communities. Hasten the day when good will triumph over evil, when men seek a good life before riches, when service is more virtuous than complacent ease, when responsible action rises above irresponsibility. What clean, beautiful, harmonious, healthy, good communities we could have. How wonderful for our children and our children's children.

### Good in the Community

How then can we have this Christian community, the idealistic haven for our families. Here again, Grundtvig gives us a clue. But first let us remind ourselves how this community is made up of a combination of people, relationships and institutions, traditions and ideals, all in a local land area. Some of our communities are easy to visualize,--village center tucked in a gentle valley with families on farms and country neighborhoods. Here life is individualistic and yet is social. Man is related to the land from which his sustenance springs and to God his Maker. How can this community come to its best?

It is God and Christ in God that can do it. Only when Christ permeates the whole community will it flower into fullness of life. When that which is special becomes more perfect. God working in this community brings out its special nature, its particular possibilities. God entering the community in fullness of his love makes complete the relationships by which men and their communities thrive. The way of redemption is best fulfilled here where man and men, man and his physical environment and man and God come into union.

At the beginning we asked for a definition of the Christian community. We said that a community is people individually and in relationship to one another and to a land area. Now we say that the Christian community is this plus the free flow of God's love through all that goes to make up a community. The spirit which makes that which the theologian calls "Christian community" becomes a reality in this local area. In doing so it becomes something complete and redemptive. It permeates all the relationships by which a man lives. The man-earth relationship, the man-man, and the man-God relationships are blended into a trinity of completeness in which is man's salvation.

### Community in Process

This ideal which we hold up seems remote, and very difficult of achievement. It is so with most ideals. Yet, it holds the promise of a more glorious life. It is the kind of hope that urges us forward. Man goes forward not only on wheels and highways but on the wings of ideals. The community of the Christian's dream need not be delayed forever in coming to reality. It can come beginning now.



This condition within the community is no argument against ascribing special entity to it. Personality in individuals as we know it is of the same nature. Every person has within himself characteristics which war against one another. In fact these unresolved tensions are a part of personality. The man who is gracious and generous in his dealing with people may daily be tempted to be a bully. A woman, exemplary in all her ways may have bents toward devilry which few suspect. The man who supports good causes may need to fight a constant battle against a selfish urge to spend everything on himself. The apostle Paul clearly saw this double nature within man. Even when a man would do good he may do evil. Struggling for supremacy in the human heart are these opposing forces. The man whom we honor as saint knows he has a devil in him. Yet, we call this being a man. He has a discernable personality, a distinct being. Made up of contradictory parts he is one and distinct.

It is the same with the community. The fact that a community has both constructive and destructive forces does not nullify its existence as a community. Neither does it take away its entity or its personality. A divided personality is still a personality. Personality may be weak or dull and lacking life but it is personality. These characteristics of contradiction and opposition only give more character to a community. A community has an entity which is more than the total of its people and their relationships to the earth and to one another. The community is person.

### The Vision of a Fair Community

Just as men long for a more perfect life within themselves so they long for a fairer day for the community. They see a community in which harmony triumphs over disharmony, where magnanimity transcends selfishness. They see the land resources used and developed for men's good and for the glory of God. They visualize a place with influences giving growth to successive generations of youth. They hear songs of joy swelling over the hills, mingling with the laughter of children. They see beauty, truth, goodness and light. They see Christ walking country roads and treading village streets.

One finds these communities everywhere. In a neighborhood in the hills of Pennsylvania people daily breathe a prayer for a superior community and steadfastly work toward that end. The little places in the hills of West Virginia, the Oregon town and the Missouri hamlet creating parks and every good thing for the community are pressing for better communities. These people want to see the entity which is the community, the personality, grow toward goodness. This hope has prompted Village Improvement Associations, contests, beautification and playground efforts, school, church and playground activities all over the land. What ideal is more to be sought for than that of a good community? With Grundtvig, our eyes ought moist with tears when we